

FY16 Q2 Quarterly Report January – March 2016

IRTOUN “Rise Again”

Funded by USAID / Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA)
and
USAID / Food For Peace (FFP)



Photo mosaic in a variety of sites in Ansongo Circle, Mercy Corps

PROJECT SUMMARY

Award AID-OFDA-G-14-00025
Start Date: 11 February 2014
End Date: 31 May 2016
Report Date: 30 April 2016
Total Award: USD \$2,827,487

1. Executive Summary

With the support of USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and Food for Peace (FFP), Mercy Corps' Irtoun program offers a package of integrated activities designed to enhance food security and economic resilience of communities recovering from the effects of conflict in Ansongo, Northern Mali. In the second quarter of 2016, the program has exceeded its objectives per its implementation plan and is working toward the close-out of current activities. As part of this process, Irtoun is working to support the autonomy and self-sufficiency of beneficiaries by working with communities to plan for their livelihood needs for the next year. Mercy Corps continues to coordinate with local stakeholders and Government technical services to ensure that the program addresses local needs and supports communities to go beyond recovery to reinforce resilience within the targeted communities.

During the reporting period, the program achieved the following:

- Train community animal health workers (CAHWs) on business planning and entrepreneurship skills to support long-term financial autonomy and enhance small business management skills
- Identification of 800 agro-pastoralists to benefit from animal feed voucher distributions in the next quarter
- Support to the vegetable cooperative in Gomno by providing fuel for their water pump and rehabilitating their fencing
- Monitoring of agricultural production levels of supported gardening groups
- Needs assessment with 150 young entrepreneurs supported by the program to identify capacity-building needs and initiate a final round of financial support
- Training of 6 VSLA Village Agents in Bourra commune
- Monitoring of Village Savings and Loan Associations and Village Agents in the 4 communes

Table 1. Award-Level Beneficiaries

Total beneficiaries targeted	25 060 beneficiaries (3 580 households)
Total beneficiaries reached this quarter	29 547 beneficiaries ¹ (4 221 households)
Total cumulative number of beneficiaries reached	54 950 beneficiaries ¹ (7 850 households)

Sector #1 Agriculture & Food Security	Objective 1: Vulnerable households in Ansongo circle recover productive agricultural livelihoods
Beneficiaries Targeted	8 400 beneficiaries (1 200 households)
Beneficiaries Reached this quarter	9 814 beneficiaries (1 402 households)
Cumulative number of Beneficiaries Reached	55 405 beneficiaries ¹ (7 915 households)
Sector #2 Economic Recovery & Market Systems	Objective 2: Vulnerable households restore livelihoods and withstand economic shocks
Beneficiaries Targeted	19 803 beneficiaries (2 829 households)
Beneficiaries Reached this quarter	19 782 beneficiaries (2 826 households)
Cumulative number of Beneficiaries Reached	19 803 beneficiaries (2 829 households)

Please note: Total beneficiary numbers are a count of direct and indirect beneficiaries (household members) that also benefit from activities undertaken by direct beneficiaries.

¹Indirect beneficiaries are estimated based on average figures for household size, and beneficiary counting discount has been applied to total number of beneficiaries as mid-term evaluation found that 13% of beneficiaries participate in two program components and 3% of beneficiaries participate in three program components.

2. Program Overview

In response to an extended period of conflict and drought in northern Mali, Mercy Corps designed the Irtoun program to enhance food security and economic recovery in Ansongo by strengthening agricultural production, helping vulnerable families protect their animal assets, and restoring livelihoods while building longer term economic resilience.

The objectives of the program are:

1. To help vulnerable households in the Ansongo circle recover productive agro-pastoral livelihoods, and
2. To allow vulnerable households to restore income-generating activities and withstand economic shocks.

Immediate food security needs are being addressed through vouchers-for-work (VfW) redeemable for food and non-food items as well as animal feed vouchers, acknowledging the importance of livestock as a food and economic resource among agro-pastoral households in the region. Through a market-based approach, Irtoun also facilitates the recovery of market gardening activities, including the most important cash crops of the region, and addresses the needs of pastoralists for improved fodder and health care services for their livestock. VfW projects support the recovery of livelihoods by helping communities to rehabilitate land, irrigation systems and agricultural infrastructure degraded during the conflict.

Additionally, Irtoun assists micro-entrepreneurs affected by insecurity through business training and a small cash injection to re-start their businesses. Finally, all Irtoun beneficiaries are encouraged to join community based village savings and loan associations (VSLA), which act as a form of safety net to strengthen recovery efforts, allowing participants to benefit from improved financial management and credit opportunities which support community driven economic growth.

By intervening and supporting in key areas of agricultural and economic livelihood recovery, the Irtoun program is providing the essential ingredients for communities to solidify a peaceful and productive future.

3. Contextual Update

In agriculture, this quarter was the major harvest period for market vegetables in the four communes targeted by the program. Average yields are proving to slightly lower than last year but higher than years previous in the program sites. The yields obtained by supported potato farmers vary from 12 to 34 tons per hectare, which is an increase over production from the baseline from last year. In some sites, communities are preparing for the off-season agricultural campaign, which includes okra and chili pepper.

Most pastoralists have reported average access to pasture/fodder, and reports this year have not shown any alarming needs. However, some transhumant populations have quickly exhausted their animal feed stocks, and there is a need for support in certain localities.

In terms of the political situation, local elections were held in the region during the reporting period, which saw a renewed mandate for RPM party authorities (the current ruling party). Disagreements erupted between different clans as a result of these elections, which made it difficult to inaugurate the new authorities. In Ansongo circle, elections were also held for a new deputy to replace the previous deputy who passed away in 2015.

The security situation remains generally unstable in Gao region. Every week new armed attacks or animals thefts are reported. In addition to these cases, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) are common along main roads used by the military, and frequent attacks have occurred against roadside checkpoints, particularly between Ansongo - Menaka, Gao - Sevare, and Gao - Kidal. Attacks were noted most frequently on checkpoints in Menaka. In Ansongo circle, IED attacks have occurred on the road from Ansongo to Menaka, and there have been frequent reports of attacks on passenger cars between villages. Traders are also frequently attacked along the Ansongo-Tessit road, resulting in reports of stolen property or money. Intercommunity conflict erupted between Ibogolitane/Idourfane and the Daoussak community in Talataye commune, which has had a ripple effect over the entire region. Several deaths were reported as a result of this conflict during the months of February and March. The widespread insecurity directly affects the socio-economic conditions of the population in the region: pastoral land is no longer (or barely) exploited and trade has slowed significantly. This increase in insecurity has impacted humanitarian access and aid delivery during this period. Both Oxfam and DRC have recently had vehicles stolen (on the Bourem-Temera road and on the Ansongo-Tessit road, respectively), and both Oxfam and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have experienced armed robberies. All of these events significantly inhibit efforts to support affected populations in rural communities.

4. Performance Summary

Sector #1 Agriculture & Food Security	Vulnerable households in Ansongo circle recover productive agricultural livelihoods			
Beneficiaries Targeted	24 010 beneficiaries (3 430 households)	Budget:	\$ 1 375 056	
Beneficiaries Reached	Reporting period: 9 814 beneficiaries (1 402 households)	Cumulative: 35 602 beneficiaries¹ (5 086 households)		
Geographic Area(s)	Gao Region of Northern Mali, Ansongo circle; Bourra, Ouattagouna, Ansongo, Bara Communes			
Sub-Sector 1.1: Livestock				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 1.1.1: Number of animals benefiting from or affected by livestock activities	0	2 000	19 189	May 2016
Indicator 1.1.2: Number of people benefiting from livestock activities, disaggregated by sex	Male: 0	490	2 172	May 2016
	Female: 0	510	443	May 2016
Sub-Sector 1.2 : Improving Agricultural Production				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 1.2.1: Projected increase in number of months of food self-sufficiency due to distributed seed systems/agricultural inputs for beneficiary households²	N/A	10 months	8.1 months	In progress
# Of community workers trained / refreshed, by sex and age	0	30	44	May 2016
# people benefiting from VFW activities, by sex and age	0	1200	1250	May 2016
Indicator 1.2.2. Number of people benefiting from seed systems/agricultural input activities, by sex	Male: 0	340	377	March 2016
	Female: 0	960	952	March 2016
Sector #2 Economic Recovery & Market Systems	Objective 2: Vulnerable households restore livelihoods and withstand economic shocks			
Beneficiaries Targeted	12 250 beneficiaries (1 750 households)	Budget:	\$ 354 819	
Beneficiaries Reached	Reporting period: 782 beneficiaries (2 826 households)	Cumulative: 16 387 beneficiaries¹ (2 341 households)		

Geographic Area(s)	Gao Region of Northern Mali, Ansongo circle; Boura, Ouattagouna, Ansongo, Bara Communes			
Sub-Sector 2.1: Livelihoods Restoration				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 2.1.1: Number of people assisted through livelihoods restoration activities, disaggregated by sex	Male: 0	60	59	May 2016
	Female: 0	90	91	May 2016
Indicator 2.1.2: Percent of beneficiaries reporting their livelihoods restored within three to six months after receiving support	N/A	80%	N/A	
Indicator 2.1.3: Total USD amount channeled into the program area through sub-sector activities	\$0	\$15 000	\$6 867	In progress
Sub-Sector 2.2 : Microfinance				
INDICATORS	BASELINE	TARGET	PROGRESS	COMPLETION DATE
Indicator 2.2.1: Number of people, disaggregated by sex, or MSEs newly receiving financial services or continuing to receive financial services due to USAID/OFDA support systems/agricultural inputs for beneficiary households	Male: 0	600	845	In progress
	Female: 0	1 000	1 834	In progress
Indicator 2.2.2: Percentage of financial services accounts/groups supported by USAID/OFDA that are functioning properly	N/A	75%	97%	In progress

Please note: Total beneficiary numbers are a count of direct and indirect beneficiaries (household members) that also benefit from activities undertaken by direct beneficiaries.

¹ Indirect beneficiaries are estimated due to unknown figures for household sizes.

² The Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning (MAHFP) measurement tool has been used for this indicator.

Sector Summary:

Sector #1: Agriculture & Food Security:

1.1 Livestock

1.1.1 Animal fodder vouchers for vulnerable households.

Rainfall in Ansongo Circle has been unevenly distributed this season, causing local authorities to advocate for NGOs to increase support to zones where pastureland is inadequate to ease the burden on pastures and reduce pressure on hippo grass harvests before the first rains of July.

To meet these needs early on, Mercy Corps has responded through the following actions:

- **800 agro-pastoral households selected for livestock feed distributions during the next quarter.** The team conducted meetings with local technical services and farmers in 15 of the most vulnerable communities, selecting villages on the basis of insufficient and/or poor quality pastureland. Selection and complaints committees were created in each community, comprised of diverse community members, including members from the village council, women, youth, religious leaders, farmers, and livestock

herders. The Irtoun team worked with these committees to establish criteria for beneficiary selection, to carry out the selection processes, and to address community complaints. 800 households were selected through a participatory process in the 15 villages, and will receive fodder vouchers in the next quarter.

• **Identification of local merchants for redemption of fodder vouchers.** Local merchants were invited to respond to a tender for fodder provision during the upcoming fodder voucher distributions in Bara, Ansongo, Bourra and Ouatagouna. Ten vendors responded to the invitation, seven of whose applications met Mercy Corps' criteria. Irtoun teams will train the seven vendors on voucher redemption procedures and will sign contracts with selected vendors prior to the distribution of vouchers next quarter.

1.1.2 Capacity building of herders to improve fodder harvesting and storage

During this quarter, training and awareness-raising activities with herders focused on the following topics: harvesting and storage of hippo grass for hippo grass producers; the different qualities of grass in rice fields; storage equipment for agro-pastoralists in the valley; and ongoing awareness-raising on best practices for harvesting and storage of fodder. To ensure wide dissemination of messages, the Irtoun team developed radio messages in local languages (Sonrhäi, Tamashek, Arabic and Fulani) which were broadcast on community radio stations. These messages highlighted the importance of preserving fodder in order to cope with the upcoming lean season.

1.1.3 Training and refresher training for 30 Community Animal Health Workers

Following the evaluation undertaken with CAHWs during the previous quarter which demonstrated the need for interventions to support the financial autonomy of CAHWs, Mercy Corps staff worked with targeted CAHWs to develop business plans to support their ongoing activities. Thirty business plans were submitted to the Mercy Corps team, of which 22 were selected on the basis of the motivation of the CAHWs and the relevance of their business plans.

The entrepreneurship team integrated these 22 veterinary assistants into ongoing entrepreneurship training sessions to enhance their business skills. After completing the training, each CAHW will receive a grant of 100,000 FCFA to fund the purchase of equipment to support their activities. CAHWs will continue to benefit from the supervision of state livestock services and mandated veterinary agents. To strengthen this relationship, the Irtoun livestock team met with state technical services and CAHWs to put in place a framework for this ongoing support and monitoring. As a result of this meeting, state veterinary agents committed to providing on-going expertise and support to strengthen the veterinary drug supply, and to provide more close monitoring and coaching to CAHWs.

Improving Agricultural Production

1.2.1 Voucher for Agricultural inputs for 1,200 farmers

Irtoun's agriculture team continued to monitor potato harvests in the 51 supported community gardens. The average yield in the 4 communes is 30 tons per hectare, with an expected production of about 486 tons, compared to 536 tons last year. Although yields per hectare last year were marginally higher, agriculture groups have been able to exploit more of their land this year than last, and are producing much greater quantities than previous years (Ansongo's averages are around 25 tons per hectare). Mercy Corps teams continue to monitor the harvest of the various crops supported by the project, and final harvest figures will be provided in the next quarterly report.

The table below shows the quantities of potatoes harvested as of March 30, 2016:

Commune	Area (ha)	Weighted average yield (T/ha)	Expected production (T)	Destination of weighed production (kg)		
				Consumption	Market	Total
Bara	2.17	12.8	28	3 460	2 023	5 483
Ansongo	7.90	30.3	239	17 284	28 342	45 626
Bourra	3.76	34.5	130	13 478	17 450	30 928
Ouatagouna	2.65	33.8	90	60 147	8 529	68 676
Total	16.48	29.5	486	94 369	563 44	150 713

In order to promote sustainability and self-sufficiency of beneficiaries, Mercy Corps has been working with agricultural groups to support them to save a portion of their income and to plan for next year's agricultural campaign. Many groups have already started planning for next year's seed procurement, and Mercy Corps has been building the relationship between these groups and local seed suppliers to allow them to order seeds for the coming year. Some producers, mainly in Ouatagouna, have sold a part of their harvest to purchase paddy rice, which they will stock and then resell once market supply starts to run out during the lean season. Other groups, for example in Bourra, invested their revenue in undertaking investments in their field, for example repairing their water pumps and rehabilitating their cement irrigation networks.



Potato and onion harvests in Ansongo and Ouatagouna

1.2.2 Training and support to 50 agricultural/gardening groups

Mercy Corps' agriculture team continues to monitor and support all 51 gardening groups, providing coaching to farmers on appropriate harvest and storage techniques, particularly for potatoes.

In anticipation of the next campaign, beneficiaries have already invested their time into preparing compost pits, including the collection of basic essentials such as rice straw, cow dung, etc.

1.2.3. Rehabilitation of agricultural infrastructure – Food Vouchers for Work



Potato storage in a silo in Ouatagouna

The garden of Gombo in Ansongo (12 ha) has received special support for the off-season campaign in 2016 in order to improve the fencing around their parcel. In preparation for the off-season campaign, authorities and community members have held three meetings to define the type of support that they want Mercy Corps to provide to the group, as well as to establish beneficiary selection and complaints management structures, monitor the progress and select supervisors for the fieldwork. The selection committee identified 50 beneficiaries (3 of whom were women) to participate in voucher for work (VFW) activities to rehabilitate the fencing for the field. At the most recent meeting, the committees worked together to establish a timetable and technical plan for the field work.



Rehabilitation of the perimeter fence at Gombo

The VFW activities are underway and are progressing well. The chairman of the supervisory committee is using Mercy Corps

monitoring tools to track the progress of the project, which involves fencing off 1,000 meters of the garden as well as rehabilitating 1,800 meters of irrigation network. Community contributions to the work included a significant number of shovels, hoes, rakes and other small construction equipment.

1.2.4. Revitalize 20 irrigation management committees

Nothing to report this quarter.

Sector #2: Economic Recovery & Market Systems

2.1. Support to 150 micro-entrepreneurs

During routine monitoring visits to targeted entrepreneurs, all funded entrepreneurs expressed the need for additional training and financial support to grow their businesses. Mercy Corps conducted a rapid assessment among the youth entrepreneurs to gauge their businesses and their financial conditions, and on the basis of that evaluation, selected 124 beneficiaries (77 women and 47 men) to receive additional training and financial support. This selection was based on the current progress of their business, motivational interviews, use of entrepreneurship tools, consistency of stocks, signs of business growth, and identification of available working space for their business.

In addition to the support provided to the 124 previous beneficiaries, Irtoun also identified 26 additional youth for ongoing support from the entrepreneurship team. These additional youth were implicated in other Irtoun activities. This additional support is intended to improve synergies between the various sectors of Irtoun activities. The 26 additional youth include

- 3 Village Savings and Lending Village Agents (2 women and 1 man)



Adama Inowa, entrepreneur in Ouatagouna

who have been identified for their exceptional performance and their interest in professionalizing their business of providing support to VSLAs start-up. They all plan to purchase mopeds to facilitate travel to additional VSLA sites for monitoring and supervision of current and new VSLA groups. These VAs will receive ongoing support to establish a fee-for-service model for continuing their support to VSLA creation.

- 22 CAHWs will be supported to develop their business plans for vaccination and animal health services. The CAHWs will use their grants to purchase veterinary equipment to help them in their activities.
- 1 new beneficiary who is practicing carpentry and looking to expand his business.

A total of 150 (79 women and 71 men) people will benefit from further training and additional financial support to further grow their businesses.

2.2. Establish/Strengthen 100 Village Savings and Loan Associations

2.2.1. Training 5 new Village Agents in Bourra on the VSLA methodology

From March 12th to 16th, Mercy Corps held a training on the VSLA methodology for newly selected Village Agents in the commune of Bourra. Five Village Agents (1 woman and 4 men) from five different villages in the commune attended the training, covering the standard VSLA modules. This training is a complement to the one completed in April 2015 for 25 Village Agents in the communes of Bara, Ansongo and Ouatagouna.



Training of Village Agents from Bourra

As such, within the 4 communes, a total of 30 Village Agents are currently trained and active.

2.2.2. Presentation of Village Agents to local and traditional authorities

The 5 Village Agents were introduced to community authorities in all targeted villages of Boura commune. These introductions took place at town hall meetings, where Mercy Corps staff explained the roles and responsibilities of the village agents, in order to ensure community understanding that the agents will take over Mercy Corps' technical training and capacity building activities as a paid service for pre-established VSLAs, and will travel through the commune and offer training and support to new VSLAs.

2.2.3. VSLA monitoring

This quarter coincided with the end of the nine-month cycle for 25 VSLAs (6 each in Ouatagouna and Ansongo as well as 13 in Bourra). Mercy Corps teams supported groups to undertake their end of cycle cash-out. All 25 groups expressed their desire to undertake a new cycle and reinvest in their associations. The table below provides an analysis of the performance of the 25 VSLA groups.

# VSLA	# members	Total number of weekly contributions	Average amount of weekly savings (FCFA per person)	Interest generated (FCFA)	Total end-of-cycle pay-out (FCFA)
25	648	54 254	100 to 250	1 032 675	9 481 600

Field monitoring demonstrates that 169 VSLAs are currently active within the 4 communes thanks to Irtoun support, including the 97 originally created by Mercy Corps as well as 72 created by Village Agents.

The table below shows the development of all VSLAs this quarter (January to March 2016).

Month	# Village Agent-generated VSLAs	# Mercy Corps-generated VSLAs	# of participants		Total credit funds (FCFA)	Total solidarity funds (FCFA)	Combined total (FCFA)
			Men	Women			
January	68	97	576	1 308	16 301 900	2 283 600	18 585 500
February	71	97	668	1 472	15 374 500	2 262 050	17 636 550
March	72	97	755	1 578	15 835 625	2 758 925	18 594 550

5. Monitoring & Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation activities during this quarter included:

- Design of tools for the evaluation of the 2015-2016 harvest, with the objective of comparing harvest figures from this year with those of last year in order to create production goals and forecasts for agriculture groups for next year.
- Adapting tools for monitoring VSLAs and agricultural activities, to take into account sustainability measures.
- Quarterly review of 151 VSLAs for the period January to March 2016.
- Analysis of quarterly assessment of 76 entrepreneurs for the period November 2015 – December 2015.
- Market price monitoring for February and March 2016.
- Draft report for the rapid barrier analysis for farm-to-table agricultural and nutritional practices.
- Drafting terms of reference and hiring of an evaluation firm to undertake the final evaluation of Irtoun

6. Coordination

The Ansongo and Gao offices continue to participate in the NGO forums organized by OCHA each month. These forums, such as the food security cluster, are opportunities to exchange and coordinate around field activities. Mercy Corps additionally had several meetings with Action Against Hunger (ACF) who is planning to start up resilience programming in Ansongo in 2016. These exchanges will allow for better coordination and result in better coverage of the intervention area.